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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CONAKRY 000229

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FOR GUINEA TASK FORCE, AF/W, AF/EX, CA/OCS, DS/IP/AF
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/22/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [ELAB](#) [PINS](#) [AEMR](#) [GV](#)
SUBJECT: TFGV01: SITREP 49: GUINEA UNREST, FEB. 23, 2007,
1300 GMT

REF: CONAKRY 224 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: PolOff Jessica Davis Ba, Reason 1.4 (b,d)

Situation on the Ground

1. (C) Today, February 23, marks the last day of the state of siege decreed on February 12. As required by the constitution, the National Assembly was called into session this morning. We expect the parliamentarians will ratify an extension of the state of siege, possibly for an additional twelve days. Many citizens have expressed concern over an extension of the state of siege and about rumors that security forces would make a series of arrests.

2. (SBU) At present, Conakry is quiet, but the calm is tenuous. Most large stores and offices remain shut down. Some grocery stores continue backdoor service or open for a few hours during the day. There is little formal commercial activity, as companies and workers continue to respect the general strike. Informal markets remain active.

3. (C) Despite the expected extension of the state of siege and potential popular backlash, there is only a light presence of security forces. Police, gendarmes, and military continue limited patrols, but most military have returned to their barracks. There are no checkpoints in town outside of curfew hours. Senior officials asked the gendarmes to prepare for an extended state of siege, but the gendarmes have not yet altered their public footprint.

4. (C) The airport remains open, with international flights approved by General Kerfalla Camara, Chief of Defense Staff. We have received reports of habitual miscommunications between the military and civilian airport staff. On February 22, Air Senegal received military clearance to land, but the air traffic controllers were not informed until minutes before the flight's arrival.

5. (SBU) The port remains nominally open, with limited staff. Ships already scheduled to arrive in Conakry are permitted to dock and their contents are offloaded. Customs has been closed since January, but we understand that major importers are paying officials to "clear" their items through the port.

6. (C) Fuel shortages persist, particularly in the interior. In Conakry, there are several stations that continue to sell. Upcountry, most gas stations are out of fuel and, due to security concerns, station owners are not placing orders.

Mining companies hire soldiers to escort their fuel delivery trucks from Conakry to their operations in other cities. The corporations pay the soldiers up to 600,000 GNF (approximately 115 USD) per trip, a sum that most station owners cannot afford. Total has expressed concern that with no ships scheduled, fuel shortages will spread.

¶7. (SBU) In the interior, house-to-house searches and arrests continue. There are reports that hundreds of citizens are in custody nationwide, mostly on military bases. In Siguiri, the military commander used rural radio to ask all residents to return items stolen in January from properties belonging to Minister of State for Finance and the Economy Madikaba Camara. The official warned that if all items were not returned, security forces would begin house-to-house searches, seizing property and arresting those persons implicated in thefts.

¶8. (C) Many union leaders have expressed concern over direct threats of arrest. Rabiadou Serah Diallo told PolOff that most union leaders have received threatening phone calls and "echoes" that an extended state of siege is designed to break the union and popular resistance movement. Other sources have told us of potential arrests as well.

¶9. (C) The Minister of Education told USAID staff that General Kerfalla has already signed a decree ordering Guineans to resume work on Monday, February 26, or be fired. The reported decree is directed to all employees in the public and private sectors and thus, by extension, to all students. If this decree is announced over the weekend, we understand that students will not be called back to school until it is clear that teachers have reported for work. The Ministry of Education is under extreme pressure to resume

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classes to avoid "une annee blanche" or annulled school year.

Political Update

¶10. (SBU) An ECOWAS delegation, led by former President Nigerian Babangida and ECOWAS Executive Secretary Chambas, arrived in Conakry mid-day February 22, returning "at the request of the ECOWAS and AU Presidents who have expressed worry about the situation in Guinea." Babangida told the press he was honored to be received by Conte again and planned to meet with representatives from all sectors of society "to gain a deeper appreciation of the situation." (Note: A Conte meeting has not yet taken place but is expected February 24).

¶11. (C) The ECOWAS representatives met with Prime Minister Eugene Camara, government representatives, and the presidents of the National Assembly, Supreme Court and Economic and Social Council yesterday. This morning, Babangida, Chambas, et al. are planning to meet with representatives from the unions, political parties, and civil society, and later, with ECOWAS and Western ambassadors.

¶12. (C) We received unconfirmed reports that there is already a new government identified to be installed under the leadership of Prime Minister Eugene Camara. Our contacts said the persons on the list definitely do not fit the criteria of a broad-based, "consensus" government. The supposed new government is likely to represent the vested interests of those who are trying to retain power. We expect that the population will reject this government if it is announced. It is unclear whether the street would defy the state of siege to protest the appointment.

¶13. (C) On February 21, Michel Kamano, President of the Economic and Social Council, called a meeting of the council to discuss the crisis. Kamano insisted that the unions and their strike are at the root of all Guinea's problems. He

said that union leaders would be prosecuted if they do not call off the strike before Monday. He warned that if the unions do not suspend the general strike, the next state of siege will be longer and more stringent than the present one.

Kamano also reportedly said that the U.S., German, and French Ambassadors have played a damaging role in the present strike.

¶14. (SBU) National Assembly President Aboubacar Sompore said on the evening news February 22 that the National Assembly was convoked to debate extending the state of siege -- an action necessary to secure the population. Sompore emphasized that looting, vandalism, and violence occurred in 30 of Guinea's 33 prefectures. He drew a clear distinction between the state of siege and the strike. Sompore emphasized that unions have the right to strike. The National Assembly President stated that Conte designated him along with the Presidents of the Supreme Court and Economic and Social Council to serve as neutral mediators. Sompore concluded that negotiations are underway to seek a solution to the crisis.

¶15. (SBU) The National Assembly convened at the Palais du Peuple this morning at 1145. Of the 114 deputies, 86 were present, 22 were sick or "on mission", and 1 was absent. There is an ECOWAS parliamentary representative attending the session. As of this writing, the deputies have yet to vote. The presidents of the majority and parliamentary opposition groups requested a recess for consultations. Also at the Palais du Peuple, the unions are meeting with the ECOWAS delegation. At 1500 hours, union leaders plan to meet with religious leaders to discuss next steps.

Mission Operations

¶16. (SBU) All employees reported for work today, and Mission operations remain relatively normal. The Consular Section reports increased business today, with most Amcit service requests for passport renewals, registrations, and for options in getting minor children to safehavens. Most of the Amcits who come to the Embassy are dual nationals, the majority of whom are minor children. The others are Amcit missionaries who are determined to ride out the storm.

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¶17. (C) EAC met at 1200 noon to discuss the current socio-political situation and its implications for security. Mission employees were instructed to remain at modified standfast: allowed to go to work, shop, or visit friends in non-curfew hours or otherwise stay at home. They are advised to keep their radios and cell phones on hand and to be vigilant.

MCDONALD